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By ELLA SKINNER BATES



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# A CONVENTION OF THE MUSES.

BY ELLA SKINNER BATES.

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## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ :

CALLIOPE (or Calypso),	Epic Poetry.
EUTERPE,	Lyric Poetry.
ERATO,	Love.
MELPOMENE,	Tragedy.
THALIA,	Comedy.
POLYHYMNIA,	Sacred Poetry.
TERPSICHORE,	Choral Song and Dance.
URANIA,	Astronomy.
CLIO,	History.

Clio, as the Muse of History, calls the meeting, and invites each member to make a report of the condition of affairs in her special department.

Each character should be dressed appropriately in simple Greek costume, sandals upon the feet, hair *à la Grec*, with a laurel wreath, or wreath of flowers, or other band as a fillet, just above the brows, and each should hold the symbols indicating her office. It is better that the costumes should be of different colors, and in extremely light shades.

Melpomene may wear black, or a white dress with a black Greek border, or a white dress and black mantle draped gracefully. She may hold in her hand the traditional tragic mask.

Thalia may choose any color she wishes, and have in her hand, or hung about her person, the traditional comic mask.

Clio must have a scroll and a stylus, or pen. Her dress should be white, with a gilt border of Greek fret.

Urania should wear blue, as typical of the sky, with the customary globe in her hand; the effect is heightened by a fillet of

stars, or a crescent in the hair, or a band of stars about the waist as a girdle.

Euterpe should have hanging upon her arm a broken lyre.

Terpsichore should have a harp or lute.

Polyhymnia, a scroll.

Calliope, also a scroll.

Erato may have some tiny darts fastened in her hair and dress as the representative of Love.

The stage should be arranged with a small platform raised to the height of two low steps, a little left of centre. Upon the platform should stand a chair with a crescent back, the horns of the crescent turning upward, so that they may be used as supports for the arms in sitting. This chair is for Clio, who, as the presiding deity, must have the most prominent position.

About the stage, and close to the platform, should be scattered low stools, and, further off, some other chairs, corresponding to the one upon the platform.

Clio enters (*right back*) followed by the others.

She crosses stage to centre, and, turning, speaks :

CLIO. I have convened you, sisters, for the time  
 Approaches when the state of earthly things  
 Demands a faithful, just and full report.  
 Let us sit down and each one, then, shall speak  
 Of her experience since last we met.

[*She points to the seats, and is about to ascend the platform, has one foot upon the first step, when POLYHYMNIA breaks in.*]

POLYHYMNIA. But, first, dear Clio, as of old our wont,  
 Sing we the hymn to that all powerful Jove,  
 Who, king of gods and men, demands our zeal,  
 Our worship and our love in all his works.

[*She opens her scroll and takes her place next to CLIO, who turns upon the first step and remains, thus, a little above the rest,*

*who group themselves about her, four on either side, in a slight curve.]*

[*They sing with appropriate movements.*]

Great Jove hear us: We thy lov-ing chil - dren Of - fer  
 our de - vo - tion, fer-vent to Thee. Yield us now Thy fa - vor,  
 Grant us now Thy bless-ing—Father all pow'r-ful Ze-us our King.

[*After the singing, CLIO seats herself. MELPOMENE takes her position, standing at CLIO's left on the platform, and slightly back. The others should seat themselves in graceful attitudes either upon the stools or upon the steps of the platform.*]

POL. [*who is not seated*]. Oh, Clio mine, the world knows not our gods;

The hymns we sing are banished all. 'Tis true  
 Those evil spirits we were wont to shun  
 Still show their faces, hideous as of old ;  
 But all the fair, sweet mysteries of our faith  
 Men laugh at, worshiping one only God. [*Seats herself.*]

CALLIOPE [*rising impetuously*]. And, sister, all my work lies in the past.

The age of hero-worship is quite dead.  
 True, there are heroes now, but none to *sing*.  
 It seems all men are heroes in this age,  
 And each one worships at his own great shrine.  
 No genius find I in whose breast the spark  
 Which may be kindled into mighty song.

EUTERPE. Yes, all the good old days are gone indeed,  
And in this scientific age men have  
No time to waste in anything but work.  
Ah, me ! to guide again the minstrel's song,  
And fill his strain with music—passing sweet—  
From those light strings he touched upon his harp.  
See, all my strings are broken from disuse ;  
I may not speak, save without music now.

ERATO. Ah, sister, ooden times were yours indeed ;  
But mine are all—past, present, and to be.  
All men acknowledge me the deathless one,  
Because love is undying, and my song  
Shows love triumphant o'er all earthly things ;  
And men become changed by my magic spell,  
Immortal as the gods, and ever young.

MELPOMENE [*slowly and impressively*]. And following in thy  
wake, Erato, comes  
A train of ills which blots the sun in heav'n ;  
Fills earth with sorrow, for men die of love,  
And women break their hearts before they die.  
Erato, thy sweet poison deadly is,  
My own heart almost breaks to think of it.

THALIA [*springing up and rushing to the front*]. Come, sisters,  
this is all too sad indeed ;  
Much that is brightest comes of love  
And love well sung, as by our sister here.  
My sides ache oft with laughing as I watch  
The strange manœuvres of these earthly fools,  
Who, feeling once Love's dart, grow straight bewitched.  
And then I search for some poetic soul  
Who also sees this universal—*woe*.  
And such strange scenes of mirth he conjureth

From all these groans and sighs of dolorous men,  
That all the world laughs. Then this same man  
Becomes a victim in the common cause  
And dies on his own sword. I always find  
So much of brightness in this merry world,  
There's no time left to weep. And of what use  
To spend the hours in sighing? 'Twill but make  
Them long and tedious, when they should be brighth and  
lightsome.  
Why sit in darkness when one may be glad?

TERPSICHORE. Right glad am I to hear thy merry voice  
After the wailing of our sisters here.  
Our task it is to lighten the world's grief,  
And bring the primal sunshine back again.  
For men, and women, too, have grown so strange,  
Why, ev'n their forms are changed. The women all  
Have hour-glass waists—and humps, where none there were;  
And then they move in angles, not in curves.  
The men [*mimicking*] just so; the women—worse than all!  
And when I try to breathe my airy soul  
Into their bodies, and inspire the old,  
Sweet measures of the mazy dance,  
Fit subjects they become for Nestor's laugh.  
Ah, sister [*to ERATO*], 'tis not love alone that rules,  
But vagrant fancies of a vagrant age,  
Which even you and I cannot quite change.  
I feel my own limbs growing almost stiff,  
So great the influence of this fashion dame  
Who leaves me naught to do in all the world.

URANIA. Dear sisters, think you there is but this earth  
On which to work? Why, since the olden time,  
I have been traveling to distant worlds,  
Which, with this ball, revolve around the sun;

And farther still, to other grander suns,  
 Which, with their satellites, are stretched in space,  
 All moving, round and round, and on and on,  
 Each bound to each by some strange, mystic force  
 We name, indeed, yet know not what it is.  
 The whole great universe bound by one law,  
 And moving steadily—by other laws—  
 To greater ends than thou hast even dreamed.

CLIO [*rising*]. Come, worthy sisters, keep your hearts in peace.  
 You speak the history of a world's great life ;  
 First, small beginnings of the infant mind ;  
 Then sad vagaries of the youth's estate ;  
 It stands just here, where we may feel the hope  
 Of better, truer things. I look on all.  
 Not one thing in itself, but all in one,  
 Makes up the history of a perfect life ;  
 So with the world's. Its grander purpose lies  
 As yet quite unfulfilled. Then to thy work.  
 Thy natures, too, must change to meet the need  
 Of this fast-growing world, whose tendency  
 Is onward, upward, to the throne of God.  
 Thalia and Melpomene, [*joining the hands of THALIA  
 and MELPOMENE*] go hand in hand,  
 For joys and sorrow mingle in the world,  
 And thus thy [*to MELPOMENE*] heavy heart will lighter grow,  
 And thine [*to THALIA*] more tender toward all human woe.

THAL. Thou shouldst have joined her to Erato here ;  
 'Tis said that Tragedy e'er follows Love.  
 But nothing fear, I'll make her even smile,  
 Who knows but laugh, before we meet again.

MEL. Yes, Tragedy wears oft a smiling face ;  
 'Tis but the mask to hide what lies behind.

That mask is Comedy's—the outside hers,  
Thy kingdom lies within and holds the heart.

[*They step back to their places.*]

CLIO. Calliope, Euterpe, spare thy sighs,  
Much yet remains to sing; and though thy lyre  
Is broken, music still enchains the world,  
And still entreats thy skill and sympathy.

[*To CALLIOPE.*] Look thou for heroes of a different mold;  
For there are many grand as those of old.

CAL. But poets, Clio, they are born, not made,  
The gem of song kindled by mighty Jove  
I still must find, or else my work is vain.

CLIO. Poets to suit the world's need thou wilt find.  
The spirit of the age inspires their pen,  
And that must guide thee also in thy work.

EUTERPE [*hopefully, trying to mend her broken strings.*] I'll  
mend my strings; perchance they'll sound again.

CLIO. Yes, they will sing in sweeter strains to men.  
Erato, Polyhymnia, go thou forth,  
Thou [*to ERATO*] singing of the human earthly love,  
And thou [*to POLYHYMNIA*] of heavenly; joining so the two  
Shall love be consecrated to high ends,  
And purer, tenderer, diviner grow.

POL. The old faith, Clio, must it die indeed?  
Is there no truth in all we once believed?  
Is Jove a myth? Then what, indeed, are we?

CLIO. The ministers of Truth; those who must work  
For that and all its ends, no matter what.

The spirits sent by Him who rules above,  
(That greater One than Jove) to do His work—  
Not hinder it—in all the universe.

Thou merry Terpsichore, go thy ways,  
And still enliven earth with dance and song ;  
But keep the spirit pure, thy heart as light,  
And thou'l yet compass something in the world.  
Urania, mine, who holdst the heavy key  
To mysteries undreamed, go also forth ;  
The world waits hungry for the coming truth.  
I wait to give thy knowledge to the world.  
Not what I *would*, but what I *must*, I write :  
The Muse of History but holds the pen,  
Which you, my sisters all, must guide aright.

TABLEAU.—All bow heads and stand before her, CLIO holding her tablets in left hand, the pen in right, pointing to them as if about to write.

Then all sing the same air as before, kneeling, and with appropriate gestures :

Great spirit, hear us,  
Thou above who reignest.  
Kneel we now before thee,  
Humble in heart.

Keep our eyes uplifted  
Ever to the highest,  
Father, all merciful,  
Whom we adore.



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